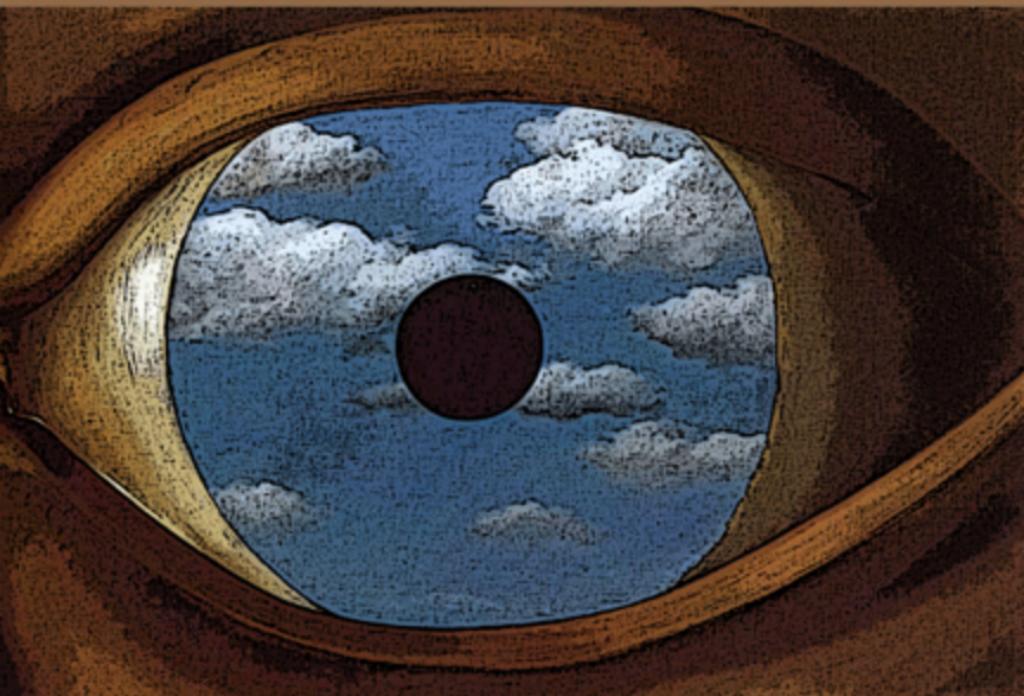


30th ANNIVERSARY EDITION

CRISES OF REJUVENATION



**BARBARA A.
HOLLAND**



CRISES OF REJUVENATION

Third Edition, Revised
With Notes by Brett Rutherford

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CRISES OF REJUVENATION

PERSONAL VALUES

Bent to right angles, the living sky
hurries its continuity of clouds
across the room;

Around it, along side of it,
dreams of the fever of stars.

If the mirror is honest,
somewhere in the neverland behind
the observer a starched gauntless
of window intimates

that outer other,
more living, more desperate,
more spontaneous and daring
than the wind course
of wall paper recently bent and organized
to house disproportionate tidiness
in domesticated freedom
and raising its regimented altitudes
against the greater of the two unknowns.

CRISES OF REJUVENATION

*I am repatriated in a moment of panic.
These are the privileged
moments that transcend mediocrity."
--Rene Magritte*

I am seized
from behind by my homeland

in a moment of panic,

when places are exchanged
and the rhythms of life reversed,

when names and the objects
which they had previously owned,
divorce for other partners,

when wood rasps granular like stone,
and rocks river grain
throughout their lasting stolidity;

in a grasp
of gravity when rain hangs
suspended like tons of hair,
loosed by dried clouds
upon deterioration,

or when the third story window
of a mansion shudders implacable blue
from untenanted rooms

and a subsequent low rumble
escapes down the garden
beneath the grass.

These are the privileged
moments, transfiguring size and enlarging
color to accommodate sky
and ocean. These are the moments
that transcend mediocrity.

RHETORICIAN!

One morning,
just about this time last summer, he
died, conclusively
and clinched his argument.

GOOD MORNING

You knocked me out
this morning; with a flash
fist you cracked my skull
wide open to the sunlight,

then edged yourself
from between its parted
halves, disheveled
by your laughter
at the wince I was.

I crawled down
into the reassurance
of the coffee pot
from which you poured my murk
through your reflection.

RAGS OF OMEN

A warm, firm grasp
of your hand on a night
when the winter
dances on the rim
of your ear.

A cousin grip assuring
your shoulder of gemmed
realities yet
to come.

End of hair
against your cheek
as scarcely tangible
and almost as unendurably
intimate as breath.

Rags of ambiguous
omen streaming
from a stranger's hedge.

LOUDER THAN LIFE

Staking out stance
and taking,
with their cushioned hoists,
curved segments of transportation,
by nailing their claim
to sidewalks
for no one's weight,
this partnership
of crutches, now adopted siblings
to no discernible
leg, acquires and abandons
distances
to no one's aid
in any unusual hour past midnight
in deserted streets.

There
past the filling station
There,
stabbing their raucous round
of corner, two simultaneous uprights
in double tilt of giant steps,

as if a man between them
were flung across a now, reached inward
from the future,
which is instantly obsolete;
were flung again,
but no one hangs between them.

The crutches stab their stride
then swing,
then stab again.

Suppose a man,

despite the absence
of any human agency!

These crutches are out
on their own, this time by whim impelled
through any neighborhood of night.

Suppose
a grip on handholds.

These crutches
are synchronized, louder
than life
and faster.

AN ABOMINABLE BREAKFAST

My eyes plough my minestrone,
seeking an alternative
to being bruised against your iron face.

Your scowl hangs
like a soaked and dripping sheet,
grudgingly releasing
filthy water which dents the table top
before it turns to scum.

You hoard your thunder
by the ton. No drop leaf was ever
intended to support such silences as yours
which squats where wood is weakest,
sniffing at our barrier
of boredom. Passionate boredom,

like a sweater which a dozen years
has colonized throughout with burrs,
stiffens until the first growth
of conversation comes up stubble;

at each glimpse recapturing the long
horse face of obstinate delusion,
and hisses like a useless faucet.

INTIMATIONS

Not as the disc face
of the incessant sky, caught in the curve
of horns that harbor the miracle
of harp strings, would I deny you
the vast moor of my love.

Nor as the tremor,
still rumoring the long gong of countless
acquaintances, can I dip less
of you from air than sound
and strain you through
the skeletons of leaves,

for now the twilight whinnies
and the stars creak on their axes,
now the fish, feathered through
from spine within
 to tufted scales without,
swims among chimneys,
a victim for ventilators.

It is a long swallow
 in the throat of the past
that gags on the lie of distance
and your absence. A mirror swings
between that serpent's eyes,
flinging some little of my face
before you, to warn you that a keyhole
may capture your timelessness
and guard it for my homeward passage.

A STREET THROUGHOUT THE YEARS

This street

is always with me
without change.

Never has anyone been visible
on sidewalks
drained by the moonlight of their breathing.

Row on row of brownstone shafts
are lifted
in unison,
each slotted
with a glass that takes
outside and throws it back
rather than announcing inside.

Glints experiment with paneling,
burn knobs,
awaking nothing.

The doors cringe in the depths of alcoves,
lurked like cowled figures
in single blocks, self hugged
to shrink
within a narrowness,
pledged to be vigilant
with eyes alone.

The street tenses.
in response to waiting.
Always ahead
there is that door,
that molding
half transformed into a column
which cannot hide
a luminescence bright enough to be
a faint glow
existing
this side of suggestion.

As I watch, it grows,
intensifies sufficiently
to bathe the steps, but suddenly
I find myself elsewhere,
the street gone.

The next time I am here
I am a half block off,
approaching.

VERNAL EQUINOX

I used your absence
up; no day of it was wasted.

When, at the first, it raised
its granite vastness
as a cliff that faced my daily door,

I wrote a sentence
on it which I never let you read.

Nor could you
ever; your return
erased it.

I cannot quote it
now, but after it was written
there, the whole cliff
quivered through its width
in drift of curtain.

That was when
it first began to shale off flakes
the size of store-front window panes,

the day I first installed my window,
the day the rock wept slabs of rain.

NOT NICE AT ALL!

I am not safe here.

I am not
safe
anywhere

while you

treat your elsewhere
brooding

to my least
commendable thoughts,

or those
that ought to be too youthful
to saddle
language,
but which
nevertheless are always
the first
to hobble home
just
as you want them —

naked!

MY OLD FRIEND, THE SORCERER

I could sit here almost
forever, watching the dormer window
of the tall house on the ridge
issue a flight of clouds.

Some bulge slowly
through the squeeze of frame, fretted
by the roughened wood. Some ooze and fray,
straggle and fall apart
in shreds. Some clot and obstruct
the window until activated by a shove.

Some sail forth
languidly like flotillas
of immaculate ironing boards.

Some puff in bounce
to freedom with sooted bottoms,

but the kick dies
after the window has done with them,
and all that is left
is the long climb upward
into the herd and across the meadows.

And how the fields bruise
with them under reiteration
of interrupted heat! I too,

wherever I am, in slow
pace of assurance,
steadied instantly,

for he has to be in there,
grinding out clouds — my old friend,
the sorcerer — the sly one!

WHO GOES FIRST?

Your clothes hide precious little
of your armor of ivory. Probably you
are unaware of the netting of veins
that runs through it. Right now, I note
the trembling of newly sprouted leaves,
parting a crevice all along your arm,
in twinkle from your shoulder
to your wrist.

A soft whip of forsythia has just uncoiled
and risen from your collar
to annoy your ear,
No, you are not a liar. You are numb,
so habit plated that the lick of truth
will never touch your cheek,
nor will the damp
weight of the scent of lilacs encumber you.

You stand too straight,
sit with the inclination
of your spine as focus for meditation,
walk shod in quandaries of chamoix,
and occasionally reproach me for never
removing these linked gloves of nerves
which have driven my rings into ruts
of accustomed bruises. A grape fall of lilac
invades your eyes. I see it, but refuse
to sniff. I smell it, but turn my head away.
My face is stamped on the reverse side
of the coin of caution which I give you,
shoving its small chill under your plate
as a fit bribe for your skittish mercy.

WHO SAYS

Who crunches cellophane
inside my head
and wakes me:

Who sets fire to the silence
with a sentence

of no possible relevance,

which hangs there,
smouldering,
but soundless,

and which clings
for days
in the curtains?

“Who?”

I cry out
to the listening
all around me.

They call me
crazy.

THE BEST OF ALL POSSIBLE WORLDS

A stone, fitted to the grasp
for throwing,
 was kicked
from the beach and hurled high
over crests of breakers,
 and out of context
into larger
experience,
 and stuck there,
dipping and lifting
on the buoyancy of air, blistering
from hide of granite
along the line of sky to shape
of piel towers, keep
and walls,
 in outgrowth
 of Basque perversity
and stuck there,

a parasitic nucleus
of armed nobility, perched
on the brow of a mountainous boulder,
at perilous threat
to shipping as the monstrous weight
lowered to the slap
of spray,
 or shot up smartly,
hoisted to the race
of clouds
 and stuck there
on updraught of pride
on diabolic insolence,
 keeping court coeval
with reality
 —and stuck there.

RAG PICKER

There you go,
hung from whatever support
keeps you dangled
to scuff of feet
that drag to the weight of the shadow
they tow behind them.

Then why is your neck
worn out with your head?
And why do you gnaw
reluctantly on a knuckle
that you never really liked?

Suppose you had to haul
your image about as I do,
and that includes your shadow
as well as the droop
in the slouch that casts it!

I have strained against
the worst laggards there are
in the junkyards of imagery,
and I have never gone
on a diet of fingers. I need them
to repair their shadows.

THE INEVITABLE KNIFE

I must look incredibly foolish.

You will have to admit
that a handle midway between
the shoulder blades
seems curious.

I know it's there. I feel it;
the humiliating wag of it in bend
of steel to weight of handle;

the glint of metal
yet unburied, triumphant
in the wink of stealth;

the chill of ice edge
encroaching on the sovereignty of spine,

and the nausea,
just as it always has been,

in the tempting availability
of a useful excrescence
for any type of push or pull,

and as it always will be.

I can never get used to it.

HIGH ON THREE CUPS OF TEA

Street lights drown
in wine. The ambered dark
breathes an unpeopled festivity,
as if the city had been recently
deserted by a circus
that left the lights on.

This has been
but the end of a day of it.

Five persons,
whose faces had never been anything
more than basically facial
 came down
with serious cases
of beautiful eyes.

I was embarrassed.

A warehouse appeared
as a Venetian palace. A limp
banana lily languished
on the lip of a garbage can
and I,
 an occasional iconoclast,
stood breathless before
the perfection
of
a parking meter.

Now,
 I go home
to delight in the cracks
in my ceiling while the light
outside my window
rinses layers of grime
on glass
 with claret.

AS ONE POSSESSED

Any time that you did not splurge
by staring at blank paper
seemed to be wasted, for the pressure
persisted, nagging between your ears,
or grabbing you by the spine
and shaking you. Sleep came and went,
but blotted none of it

And so the words were pinched,
twisted, stretched and worried;
forced through a hole in your forehead,
which widened with their girth,

and everything rocked,
limped, staggered and sagged;
flesh from spectral insufficiency
which made no sense in the flesh
or out of it. You could not forget it.
That was forbidden,

but if you insisted on scratching at it,
you broke your nails,
and then your fingers. If it died
to forget you, it stole
a birth from you to be remembered.

THE BREAKER

In the grasp of a wave
you were gone;
by a wave flung back.

Where are you?

After the wave withdrew
the beach was wet with stars.

But now the stars
are dried and you
are out of reach.

Speak to me
from all the many voices
in this whispering sand.

Somewhere the sun must find you.

AUTUMN WIZARD

for Ray Bradbury

When he fed your adolescence
on the youth of his poems, do you remember
his fireplace releasing
his personal Octobers in sendings
of unusual leaves; that they were crimson,
indigo, coral and turquoise
when they streamed
a spiral from the hearth grate
out and once around him
on their long glide to the ceiling?

Do you remember that his house
was a gaunt spinster with a rhomboid eye
browed under angle of a gable; that the raw
dawns of the crows had galled
its clapboards?

He was a poet then, as thin and angular
as his house, and of a desperate season,
when the sky screams and the clouds
become impulsive. Not for all his summers
has its bite diminished,
even when the green-up
hit him and his wallet swelled with May.

He has been poet still,
despite the blockage of a moveable screen.
The Autumn stuffs the yawning
of the fireplace and the flue packs solid.
The screen is a wall of gems,

but even so, he sometimes
removes it and the room is brawl
of burst October when the crush
crumbles and the whole belch of it charges
the dining room door. Then he burrows
through the heap of his poems for air
while his house leans on the wind.

MIDNIGHT ON THE ESPLANADE

You have propped your conservatism
on the rail of a bridge. Bright smudges
of lights awaken only a glimmer
in cufflinks; not the sharp burst
from unclouded metal in response
to the glare
from spike-crowned lamps, sided with glass,
but minor luminescences
from smears of gold.

It is no night to wink manic
with cufflinks, but one which molds
chimeric monsters above the huddled
houses in the street below;
a night that dances on cheekbones
with swarms of microscopic feet,
a night that wads traffic in cotton batting,

and no night at all for an off-duty
businessman, who carelessly raises prodigious
wings from the shoulders of a tuxedo,
to allow his faultless tailoring
to soak through, and his plumage
to mat to a near slime, packed tight
against the back of his coat.

But, nevertheless, there you are,
prodding at brittling financial considerations,
and drowning your face in fog, while first
one wing and then another, loosens
under moisture and shakes free a bit of cramp
from the discipline of muscles.

Feathers lift and ruffle
down currents of gloss. An impetuous flounce
stacks a side of sleekness
against the dullness of serge.
There is no alteration of your expression,
or shift of your hands. And your lion,
successfully trained in Yoga, lies
less impatiently on the coolness
of the flagging
behind you than either of your wings
on your cogitations, and awaits
his enlightenment and your decision
to continue with your long walk home.

CLOSE CALL FOR THE SECRET AGENT

The tiny quintets of toes that had spattered
the parapet, as if after intermittent
catfalls during the preceding night,

disquieted investigators,
who wondered why they were indelible,
what type of marking substance
had etched them there, and what
sort of night had happened anyhow.

If anyone had told them
of the correct gentleman in the impeccable
suit, who had walked up and down
the length of those neatly fitted
segments of granite, folded tightly in
upon himself with the severity
of a furled umbrella, and who had tapped
out his impatience with the tips
of his fingers
on the rock, as if the gray of it
had barely clouded the keyboards
of several petrified typewriters

they would have paid no attention
at all, but if they had heard the slightest
suggestion of fingerprints, left there
by the secret agent, they would have had those blocks
rooted up, hoisted, crated and trucked
off somewhere for insatiable testing
and, like as not, would have lost a whole
police force in a man-hunt for the secret agent,
whose only crime had been the temporary
dislocation of an aspect of cultural faith.

They were not told. The timely intervention
of a sparrow easily distracted them.
The infuriating spots soon vanished.

THE RETRACTABLE BOOBY-TRAP

After scraping
myself from the asphalt,

after prodding
a mutinous hip,

after brushing off
and straightening up
my dignity,

after stuffing my embarrassment
back in my purse,

I searched both curb
and gutter for the thing
that tripped me.

It was a dog,
of course, now
three blocks hence,
strayed again from
his human, tightening
his hawser
straight
across the sidewalk
at the height of shin.

Effective as a booby-trap
with retractable
evidence.

How many pedestrians
did you tumble today?
How many limping
gaits proclaim
your outing?

NOT NOW, WANDERER

Evening by evening
your shadow lengthens, but with this
Autumn, as with others past,
it is a lie.

Never does it lengthen
sufficiently to fall on me.
Never does the dark grasp
at the end of your reach
fasten upon me and lift me
to the crags where you stand guard
and listen to my waiting.

Still, the high howl of my hunger
for you swoops, a lost bird,
between your messenger ravens.
I walk at night, expecting their brush
of blackness across my cheek,
but no feather of them tells me
by contact that you are nearer.

Not now, Old One. Not at any
other now do I need you
less than in previous Autumns,

for the familiar and delectable tearing
in the ring of my pelvis
and the hot cloud
fattening under my ribs, merge
with the leaves' urgency
and the moon's tight-fisted tension.

With this suspense and the concentration
of desire, I make my instrument
of destruction and creation.

When Time shall bring my arms above
and around the granite
of your shoulders, and I am lost
in the folds of your cloak;
my waiting assuaged in the cavern
left vacant by your eye
beneath your hat brim,

my extension will shorten,
my aim will quirk, my concentration
will sputter and the old work
of will and incantation
will dry up,
forgotten.

I need you,
but even
more than that,
the need for you. Love,
lust, or the inevitable conquest
by thunderbolt,
penetration by cast
of lightning on the bare slopes
browning above the fever of foliage:

our predestined collision
and the coiled sleep
in the crater of your vacant eye
must be withheld as many years
have kept them
pocketed for the conservation
of power.

Your beard
gathers grayness. Your face hardens
with the weather as thunder
rehearses its yearly promises
among the hills. Somewhere beyond
a number of Autumns, or even beyond
all Autumns ever,

you will become a receptacle
for my remnants, pieced,
at the last, among your bones.
Wait, Wanderer, till then.

Not now!

TAKE FLIGHT TO MONTREAL!

Do you know what that tentacle,
now weaving itself
through the slats of your fire escape,
has done for the front of your building?

(It has not adorned it!)

that when the citrus slant
of early sunlight
illuminates it from underneath,
when lifted,
and catches the pallor
of its suckers wide-eyed,

cabs slew broadside
to the traffic and squad cars
settle single file
across the street?

I suppose
that whatever pours it
like a viscid dripping
from one of your open casements
was installed in your fourth floor loft
to frighten burglars,

but
nevertheless
you could have encouraged
whatever it is
to hoist its excess yardage
inside
even if you balked
at arranging its removal
or an adequate explanation.

You had better
plan on a long
and immediate
vacation in Montreal.

THE ITINERANT WINDOW

High on the night

the slow drift
of your windows southward

with frequent
idling
pauses.

The long reach
of brilliance sizzling upwards
from the grass
dazzles
over sill
and downwards.

Today,
lodged accidentally
in oak boughs,
onyx
caught out startled
in the leaves
winds tossing lozenges
of glass about;

tonight,
perhaps,
a strong gust
unloading a lead-crossed
rectangle,

and nudging it
once more
across the dark,

suddenly
switched on
by laughter.

BEFORE THE BEGINNING

A poem clots
like storm accumulating
above a headland.

Where space so recently
was deep
blue breathing,

a huddle of inquisitive
giants match
the power
of competitive shoulders,
each trying
to be the first
to catch
a glimpse of me.

I hurry
to the beach before the rain
begins to break
in braille
against the sand.

A COVERING LETTER

Dear Editors:

I am sending you five rocks.
They are overstatements of weight;
too solid to stare
into immediate dust; too quick with pyrite
and quartz to be tedious, yet sufficiently
conglomerate to confuse you,
if you are normal;

too much given to erratic winking
to leave you in peace; infusible,
insoluble and entirely
untractable, but just vivid enough
to make a vague blur out of anything
you choose to set beside them.

If you reject them,
you will be ridding yourselves
of the five best items
for keeping other people's poems
from blowing away,

of the five items best suited
for throwing through the windows
of the Ford Foundation,

and if you keep them,
you had better not forget
to make them available
for public inspection,
because, if left unused,
they rot, and in so doing,
they are radioactive.

ENTRANCE OF ORIGINS

Your face clears, and the rock behind
stands out. A long swathe of your cheek
has worn to granite. A crackling
of mica flakes beneath your eye,
and the bald
smoothness of a boulder has burnished
a subtle curve of cheek bone. Above the ledge
beneath your eye moss drips a green
stain, from a yellow arch, which leaks
through fissures at the corners,
and drains off, eating more cheek away
until the harsh grain and the scab of lichen
emphasize the gouge that writes parenthesis
to nose and mouth. Slowly your face
disintegrates and terminal moraine erupts,
complete, unaltered and frighteningly alive.

APPORTS

Shadows of a June day under my feet.
These I can understand;
transient, irrelevant.

There is no more grief in these
than dust. Shoes shuffle them.

Winds rip them from the sidewalk
and store them away in poems.

I glance at the ceiling now.
Can all these shadows, dancing on my paper,
have fallen like a plaster surrender?

Do they evacuate your poems
for mine when the wind is reading?:
silos of remembrance
trailing shadows of Carcassonne?

NOT FUNGUS, NO, NEVER THAT!

I am no longer bothered
when that rotten stump breaks out
in another human ear.

Already four have fitted
themselves neatly
against the bark.

Two, nestled
at fork of roots,
cup skywards.

A cluster of six in miniature
sprouted only yesterday. I wonder
if the rain has any bearing
on their size. They are so
delicate, those small ones,

and apparently quite attentive!

I merely observe, go out there
and catch up with any
that might have planted themselves
in the dark by stealth.

I have finally come
to accept them, even more than that,
enjoy them. They are company
for me, you know.

They make me feel interesting.

SCHUYKILL WEATHER

With the air sagging
from its fastenings all around you,
and your head
sticking up there to prop it,

there is no chance
for your knees at all. Your hands sulk,
drooping from their roots
at wrists, like sodden maple leaves
that drip aphids and itches.

It is all yours to walk
the weather's weight with your feet.
Your clothes insult you. You could bite
the first slam of a restless door.

The atmosphere nags, committed
to a grudge it holds,
like a threat of blackmail,
or a pistol between the ribs.

IMAGINE YOUR GUITAR

Flinching, tremulous;
tweaked
like strings,
an instant oscillates
and worries
air. I imagine
your guitar
as tension
strung to no rigid
frame, no bowl
of resonance,
but as an arbitrary
scale you pinch
against the stars,
once wince at a time.

The zenith flutters.

THE RAUCOUS HOUR

The whiskery tip of a russet tail
flicked out from under
the sofa bed.

Small wonder!

Last night at eleven thirty
Beethoven's tally-ho *Emperor*
cleared two chair backs,
a book-piled table
and the northernmost window-sill
straight through the lowered sash.

A searching broom
has yet to dislodge the fox.

The ceiling releases
another knob of plaster,

which strikes
a glass and breaks its.

The floor sinks wetly
to my tread
after Handel's Niagara.

Underneath or overhead,
next door
apocalypse
explodes late
every evening,
and early Sunday mornings
to awaken God.

THE EVENING FISH

The fish that a clean dusk lures
between the stripped twigs
of television thickets and chimneys
choked with crooked pipes
that stagger in coolie hats or balance
the rotation of spheres and the creaking
mobility of ventilator sculpture,

this once were out too early,
and let the sun flash them from brick
and rusted iron, strike coral rhythms
from their sides and shrill
an agony of silver from their fins,

this once, when preceding evenings
had allowed only one explorer
to rest, nose tangent to an upright
and tail a perpetual ripple to secure
a moment of stationary suspension,

this once, before the blue strengthened
and broke out in a lively rash
of scattered stars; well before the cat
returned with feathers in his whiskers,
the same that so recently
had silkened the overlap assumed
to be scales, blazing from the swarms
that streamed from cupolas
dropped over water tanks,

this once before fillets of feathers
seeded the city wind for trawlers.

SO THERE, DESCARTES!

I have had all the time
in the universe to examine that table,
the rug,
the chair,
and still I am not
convinced of his departure.

But he has disappeared. He took his feet
away when he removed
his head, shirt, tie and coat;
everything he was
above the table.

Maybe
he left his feet
in front of the door
of his top floor room.

I shall waste
no time in climbing
all those stairs
to see.

He should be behind
that unreplenished cup. An obstinate
fold of his overcoat
laps down darkly
at the side of his chair.

I would never allow
myself to interfere with the reveries
of a secret agent,
 who could be
the muse, the saboteur subversive
and obvious as always.

SUBWAY EXIT

It had to be he.

He was always like that;
always going away;

always his long
familiar back;
his giveaway gait,

going,

while keeping his face
where he was going,

keeping his identity
untapped,

just as he was at this moment;

ten steps upward
and ahead of me,

keeping his face in sun
and street for recognition.

Was I to crush against
the wall and pass him?

to call out his name
as if to spin him backward?

or watch his back
receding —
if it were he?

SUSPENSE FOR DAYS

Is it

or is it not
going to open up

and when
if it does?

This

I have asked
myself

when the steeple
riffles
slightly at the base,

loosens
its sheath of brick,

and lets it
hang in folds as if
about

to slam
against the sky
as basin of a raised

umbrella.

Much
too often
just about to,

like preliminary
nasal tugs

announcing
sneeze!

STRIKE TWO

I have just replaced
the mirror with an echo,
which fills the pallor of its absence
with a perfect fit.

Switching
from sight to sound required
no radical adjustment.

Soon I no longer
looked there to see if I was being watched,
and went about my business,
throwing the wall a word
instead of the usual nervous glance
and got the word back,
slightly altered,

instead of
the image which the old glass
smudged and blurred as if from constant
indecision as to how I should have
been reported.

Now
there is greater likelihood of an honest
duplication, but when the time comes
for my ear to be
continually alert to any
silence from the wall,

not for gratuitous comment,
but for the possibility that I am being
overheard, I shall remove the echo,
as I did the mirror, and leave
the wall a blank for shadows,
at the risk of being grabbed.

SUSTAINED ENCHANTMENT

You were always
old
in there. Way back
behind accretions
of protective selves,

wise;

sunken inside your own
dark oracle, on which your volatile
awareness floated,

took fire
when any particle,
spun off from my unraveling
vexation,

merged with the frost
that streaked a moon life through
your somber and forgiving
patience,

like the cirrus bridging
the conspiratorial circuits
that pervade your hair;

intrigues
among arcana. You were
always intolerably
beautiful in there.

I fought you much
too often for my health.
My nerves screamed
in unison,
still do
and will

until I am caught back
in my ageless home, somewhere
between the dawn
and darkness

in your Satori.

THE SOUND OF THE TINKLING CYMBALS

They are here again today.
Their fingertips are alive
 with buttercup bells.
Patterns cut out of sunlight play over
the flowers that dance
in the winking of their hands.

Hear them, Jerusalem!
Already the air is rain waiting,
pausing upon its patience until the end
of the celebration through which
 the children,
peering above the sills
of their eyes, are asking
if I am harmful.

Is it not foolish of them
when their chants cling to the corners
of my darkness after their dance is done?
My rooms are still and weighted,
thick with the heather
on the breath of the gods,
and all night long the invitation
of the fire in the bells.

These are my brothers
who counsel me in the singing
of unknown birds.

IN THE CAUSE OF JUSTICE

Nothing popped up
out of that walnut

at him

when he split it
open.

Nothing diminutive
shrilled
an insult.

Nothing spat
when he crushed the shell.

Nothing at all
untoward.

Nothing exploded.

The shell
was not even empty.

Boycott walnuts!

A CUP OF COFFEE

When you lift the sash
of your window, up goes
wherever you are behind the upper one,
and it remains there, writhing
with apple boughs, galloping
with a headlong meadow nowhere,
while being its usual self in motion.

But outside and underneath, my present
situation spies on you.

Fire escapes scuttle
under a roofing of heavily drifted
snow, climb into tree tops,
or harass the base of a village spire,

and you sip your coffee, not yet
willing to recognize the texture
of the wind that cools it,

staring at what you expect to see,
which actually rattles
above your head, trapped between two
plates of glass like the twin
fake lenses, composed of the business
of ants, that were framed
into spectacles for Salvador Dali.

Then, when you slam your window shut,
the meadow and orchard
telescope into your recent
illusion, driving both it and mine
to their customary distances,

and once again the fire escapes
threaten my neighbors' windows.

THE IRON URGE

It is a night of steel.
The stars sting and refuse to desist.
A smirk of a moon has been
newly sharpened. You can hear it
ring when a surreptitious breeze
scratches its back against
the crescent's curve.

It is the kind of a night
that grasps both of your shoulders
and wrenches them; a night
when your body shrinks inside its coat
and loses contact with its lining;
when the sky is pallid
with the pearly frost of arrested breath.

The moon stirs, shrieks
distantly beyond the crags, but the high
profile of the head and beak
of the eagle, emerging
from the pinnacle, is silent.

The mountain is slow in the process
of hatching. It is cutting
a predator instead of a tooth, and the three
eggs, bleakly gleaming from their nest
on the balustrade, freeze
inward from the crackling surfaces
of shells, through pyrite yolks,
to agate verbs, unwinged and aging.

A TRYST BENEATH A BIRD HOUSE

You have gone
up into your head, and have vanished
completely. What
can be going on up there? The lights
have been awakened
all at once.

The ladder
which you must have climbed,
no longer props your chin. Someone
must have drawn it up. Are the birds
healthy? Are they eating well?

I just saw two indigo buntings
hurtle out of both
your eyes in unison,
like simultaneous bullets.

It must be fun
to do that, especially when your finger
flips the right switch unconsciously,
and off they go;

or when a gull sails out of your mouth.

It seems so easy.
Maybe everything is easier up there.
I never got that far.

I stayed behind,
down here hoping, at the low end
of your neck, to meet you
at your collarbone.

THE BLIGHT

He never sits still.
Undisclosed business sends him
on mysterious errands out
of the room and back, then out again,

but if he is unable to climb
over human legs or ease
his energy between the chairs,

he will thrust his crooked smile
across your shoulder
and rattle it against your ear.

He extracts individuals from a crowd,
drags them into corners and
 murmurs darkly
 that the moon is rising
 that the lawn needs mowing
 and that he knows the cube root of 22,056

(and you know what that means!)
He proposes to announce it at the next
meeting of the Board of Estimate
if his victim refuses to give him
 the window at the second story front
 the fireplace in the parlor
 the column at the northeast corner of
 the porch
 the Wedgwood spittoon
 and the smaller of two stuffed walruses

as embellishments for the cardboard palace
he intends to build, and through which
he has vowed to ride a bicycle
in pilgrimage past all his mirrors, leaving
behind him a votive offering
to every image of his suit and tie.

If indeed the Board of Estimate has not
been coerced to snore for a week
through solutions of quadratic equations,

or the swimming pool
with the Picasso mosaic
at the bottom has not been filled to the top
with tar
in excess of the truckful which has clogged
the chimney.

HOME CAN BE ANYWHERE

They come in clots; the abused buildings
with boarded windows, the empty shops
and bars that barely function.

Between them, squashed houses
sink in lots, frantic
 with the dance of Shiva,
that suffers from a sick burlesque
of scrub pines, or with deciduous runts,
 whose fat
bouquets of leaves fuss
in their discontent
against indifferent walls.

All these along the edge
of a fed-up ocean,
dabbing at the shore by habit,

whose beaches, three parts soil
 to one part sand,
breathe an unlikely green
against their raw sienna.

A fossil, still alive
in squalor? The crisp, blue buses
rocket through its veins,
carrying no advertising,
even for miracles,

but the proud plaques, in every park, weep
the gilt loose from the grooves
of letters, that spell the count
 of those who died
in two World Wars, Korea and Vietnam
for Staten Island, but never
note Staten Island's death.
 Be sure of that!

They burnt the certificate
that made that real,
and lie about it brazenly
in air conditioned buses. Home
can be anywhere at all, they say,
even on Staten Island, and they mean it.

SOME DAY A SUDDEN CRAVING

Old blood goes bad.

Only freshly siphoned blood
leaks new life into veins,

and so, at the weekend
he comes home
with bottled refuse blood

to feed the roses:

white, with no blush
rising. Innocence of Borgia,
the Pontiff's kin;

thorns tucked away
in thicket leaves. Beguiling
kitten roses. Claws
straining in velvet lairs.

Old blood
goes bad in storage,

but sated with mild
hallucinogens, his roses
thirst for something real.

They smile at him.

THE BRAIN WALKS CLOSE BEHIND

Your face precedes you. By some three inches the business section follows it, keeps it positioned for recovery should panic speed it into partnership and catch it unprepared, as when a word of greeting snags in the stateliness of its passage and arcs the crevice between both halves in front of your ears.

So often I have seen the ritual your nose and cheekbones leading their high commands; a triumph of bowsprit, an elevation of reliquary. presentation of armorial claims, while eyeless and with folded hands an attendant animates or wears it,

until a stare or a word too strong to be trapped between the lid and the box springs abrupt collision and catches your largo summarily, with or without intention,

and you are all of a heap in yourself at once. It happens often, but drops no mileage from the march, invalidates no prestige.

ANCESTRAL VISION

Now your recurrent
father surfaces; from crypt
of dream, from all humanity's
first oracle holds court,
transfiguring the face
behind your beard. And who
are you? Priest, Hierophant?
Scholar of Akashic scripts?
Our common ancestor who counsels
elves? Confessor to all
innocents who seek the Grail?

Your youth denies it.
Your casual eyes conflict
in seeming with an intensity
that holds them captive
to a cosmic wisdom.

Are you gone up
in smoke, leaving this august
and learned personage custodian
of your body, or are you
host to a more aggressive
spirit, shuffling both
immortalities inside your skin
to justify one ego, or are you
saint in fact, fiction
painting your identity on subtle
truth? And what is that?

THIS CERTAIN QUAINTNESS

Good gray Grand-Daddy, stuffed
into the clutter of a room too small
for emotional surprises, rummages contentedly
through psychic bric-a-brac and bits
of this and that left over from a padded century;

 a peacock sadly used
by years; an aquatint of the Prater; fussy
doilies everywhere; a mixed bouquet of dried
leaves and dead grass; a sculptured
marble clock, wriggling with ormolu; the smell
of dust-thick portieres, all spilling
from an era spawned by such minutiae,
while somewhere underneath the papers
on the desk an old id waters
at the eyes; while above the circling time
an Oedipal triangle holds hands
in gilt clinging to sensuous lead;
while in the basket by the hearth

 an infantile
libido sneezes; while in the wideness
of outside the oily spread and sprawl
of a squirming light-show oozes from being
into nothing and back again, spelling
the name of Sartre

 on cockroach carapace of Now.
Would it were Jean-Paul Jones instead!
But nothing ever seems quite simple,
 even names.

This is our heritage, which never
was completely serviceable, being a hamper
full of hand-me-downs, knitted conundrums,
whose soiled and simple answers glut
the button box, mementos of the

 Franco-Prussian
War and memoranda on the thrust of birth.

What shall we do with all dear Dr. Freud's
accumulation of pressed infancies? Now that
we have become so long accustomed to them,
how can we bear to trade off
for uncertainties, this certain quaintness?

KEEPING THE WINDOW CLOSED

The last time
I opened the window
the moon got in,

streaked through
between the sill and sash
and plunged into the mirror.

It stuck there.
Now I cannot get it
out from between
the mercury and the glass.

Look in the mirror
any time of day or night,
and there the moon is,

guarding the absence
of your image
and gloating serenely,
I resent it;
the stars too,
that were sucked behind
the speed of moon
into the parlor,

where they roosted
on anything and crackled,
flared, went out,
then flared again,

and vanished.
That...bothers me.

THE SUMMER'S FINAL SEASON

It was vulnerable; that deep green dent
in the range of mountains. Spring and Autumn
roused watersheds that made an unbroken mudhole
of the glowing fields. Winter brought
avalanching snow, and ice in crevices,
that slid off cliffsides, sending them to plough
the steeps that once had held them, or sprang
the gangwar boulders, sending them
down in leaping triumph, end over end,
to the certain demolition of anything that blocked
their way, Summer sank down among the peaks,
or burned high in unmoving air above the village,
which somehow had crystallized there,

even under these
conditions, and had remained intact for
centuries
with a repair here, a patch there; bright
with whitewash and weeping thatch,
hard edged in a loose
geometry of clusters. The Cross on the church spire
agonized even the far-off observer's eye.

Sheep mourned and roosters cheered. Laundry
danced on Mondays behind the kitchens.

Children repeated
hereditary rites in the rutted roads, but still,
now, in the cauldron of Leo, a black smudge of no
disturbing size, hung as if appreciably distant
above the village; hung motionless, gained density.
grew blacker, larger, as if in slow and regular
descent. All was untainted around it.
Heat dazzled in the dooryards. Barns and haycocks
quivered in the haze, and the days drowned
in their nightfalls. The moon took over,
chilling around
the blot that never scattered, never shredded
or shifted from its post above the huge house
of civic affairs, yet thickened
with each hour's weighting.

It was a dream, of course, a night's glimpse
bitten from a long succession of the same
in a history of suspense. Routine had long ago

numbed everyone. One day the cloud would liberate
its cargo, would tire of its darkness
 and release it
on unwavering sunlight, or else would plummet
like a stone on target, bringing both contents
and container, if they were separate,
 crashing
through the rooftops in this thimbleful of motions.
But after so many abortive catastrophes
 had loomed
once and had been forgotten, what difference if
a deviant threat imperiled this tedious splendor!

THE CAPRICORN TAPESTRY

Out there in the darkness
bushes wink up at him.

For us, they are enlivened
by fireflies, but to him they are cover
for marauders. The telephone
sits guileless, on the table,
 saying nothing.

Let its silence
be tapped, for silence listens
to unspoken guilt.

Call out the goon squad!

The one-man vigil
across the street, crashes
through drawn blinds and the message
on his swaying placard,
in the ice-blue of unwavering light,
reads its repeated accusation
from every mirror.

a sinister white sphere,
now resting by the herbaceous border,
has been lit with leprous
malignancy by the moon,
and is bound to explode.

Even the surface
of the moon is scouted by astronauts,
looking down here,
plotting something.

Order them back! Quickly!

Throw them a banquet,
Anything, to keep them
 from getting up there
to spy on the chimney.

Who knows
what danger may seep
down the flue.

THE LODGER

The sky herds its clouds, at least
on two sides of this floor and ceiling.
A modest wall secures their hopefully
stable relationship. The bed dozes,
 but not the comb,
stood nearly on its head,
 which teeters
on one corner gleefully and which,
 thank God,
though scaled to the universe
of an almost floor-to-ceiling goblet,
dents the mattress only slightly.

A match from that same dimension lies
regrettably slack on the carpet, its wood
relaxed almost to the pliancy of twine.
The wardrobe, all of glass,
except for its frame, has been scrubbed
to the cleanliness of nothing at all,
and proves itself to be an admirable
container of nothing. It is a good room,

a small and well swept corner
of experience, which just this week
is entertaining some random items
from a somewhat mismatched awareness,

but does it matter,
 when you come down to it?
The clouds are purposeful
in their drive
 and the carpet is spotless.

I would never leave this room at all,
except for the rent, and that
is reckoned only by the type who darkens
the exquisite blue in that glass with wine.

SHADOW FAKER

It can hardly be easy to summon
shadows after sunrise,

to pack them
in concentrate about

your waking,

molded to your appearance,

yet that is what you drag
out of bed every morning,

When you plunge your clouded
consciousness into the bath, the water
undoubtedly forces unattached
masses of darkness
upward and about your head.

for now you have shaken
the splendor of night from about
your ears, after entering,

a tall drift of coolness,
into the field of fluorescent inspection,
still reminiscent of a slender
rise of winter smoke.

How much of you squanders
your reality
in keeping you a fake
hallucination?

AQUILA

It is difficult for me to speak
the audacity of your images
into my descriptions of you,
as it must have been also for you
to loosen and tumble the side of a mountain,
before you eased yourself
out of the peak that hatched you,

while blinking at the bleached sky
and the great fins of snow behind you
as the moon bounced its replicas against
your pride and retrieved them
for bent reminders.

There was then as now,
the same experimentation
with the muscles of back and shoulder,
the same tentative archings
of unmanageable wings, which rose again,
even though completely exhausted;

the same crane of your head
to the zenith and the same attempts to whet
both your beak and eyes against the moon,
as if in anticipation
of that extended gaze that leaps
for the sun and grasps it
as now. But then, the process
was longer and far more cautious. For now,
as in two hand grasp you set the lectern
between your purpose and your audience,
the high heft of your wings
is definite, their grandeur
as chilling as the night
that willed you from its granite,

and your lashes take fire
from the cargo stolen from the sun
behind them. The flint ridges rise
in blades from your shoulders,
and the drone
of recycled formulae from several
years' storage in this one room,
is broken as the eagle crashes
against the ceiling. There
the spell is terminated. Night hardens
into deafness, drowning.

COMPANIONS

These boots, familiar,
are wearied with the weight of walking.
Bare toes peep out through leather
as the boots transform to feet

The feet crack with drying
and the boots are aching.
Standing before the fireplace
these boots, these feet become
as one and wait there patiently
to be thrown out together.

The owner will have to do
without either boots or feet;
the feet before they crack and stiffen
and the boots have flattened arches.

THE SORCERER'S MOON

On a patch of sod
at the forking of two roads
there grows a tree;
its leaves compact and black,
in contrast with the woods behind it,
which cradles the infant moon.

the same moon that vibrates
from the mirror in your absence;

the same moon that soars
beyond the mountain peak
that disgorges a granite eagle;

the same moon drenching
a meadow in which a giant wine glass
swirls the fragments of cloudlets
in its gullet; the same which our hands
would touch in search for keenness
burning, as if with the intensity
of cold, the anger of outrageous summer.

SKY HANGER

According to the instructions I had
to jump, I did
from the ledge at the top of a mountain
into nothing and plunged
a short shock downwards,
then steadied upon the air.

The mountain backed away
from me and merged behind me
with all its brothers

and I was where I was

alone

from a wide wing dangling,
thinking of the absurdity
of my moccasins

when hanging from skies
that pulled in tall heaps of blue
above me, facing a wall of hills
that bucked and heaved at times
on their line of march along the valley
or jostled with one another

while down some thousand
feet below were dairy farms
resorts, spires, silos, an eyecup lake,
or a country road, unmindful
of a speck that eddied where I was,
naked in my fear of Up and Down
and of Out to Every Side
in all their vastness.

ADVANCE UPON CANAAN

We were a long time coming:
Ours was no Exodus,
but a continued coming:
not as the dunes creep,
soon to be anchored by grass,
scrambling across them,
not as the waves which are always
coming, but never arrive.

As burrs fasten to pelts,
as pods on one wing circling,
and nearly invisible, slowed and halted
by fitfulness of wind,

we came upon Canaan
and took root in the midst
of the brush, grew up through thicket
and resistance of indigenous tribes
until we were grown enough
to look over the dunes
toward our Country and presentiment
of our City, at one time
Babylon, at another Jerusalem.
In both home and in the wilderness
we shall sing the song
of our lady of revelations
in a strange land.

Above our heads in the sky
the wheel turns, still turns
and is stilled: all wings and eyes
seeing and seen, moving and motionless
completion of ourselves
at our exit as at our beginning,
packed thick with good and guilt

At one with our fathers,
judges, kings, prophets,
back before realization in constant rotation
over the top of the hill,
from which we shall see the land
we have yet to conquer,
though we may not attain it
in our ration of life.

The dunes come
but they are anchored by grass.
The sea is forever coming,
but never arrives.
Ours was a continued coming
over the ages to Canaan
beneath the chariot wheels
which have yet to come.

LEAVINGS

Those legs you left here
still stick straight out
across the doorway. Some day
they are going to trip me,

and that spread of hand and forearm
pressed against a panel,
probably to brace a leaning shoulder
and somehow in brightness —

(that kitchen light
has always dazzled me)
but not in shoulder. Oh no,
No arm there. Just an aggressive
jutting from between the coats.

Then that chevron fringe of beard
without a face to hang it
dangles for a moment in the mirror;
one hand wrings a clutch of fingers.
There is always a merry crackling
in the corner when that happens,
always beside the refrigerator.
And no one left to snoop for beer?

An eye rolled to the side
comes on, goes off. A bent back
at my desk, a strain of shirt
across the shoulders: highlights
which the desk lamp caught and lost.

And how about that foot and trouser
to the knee, supported
by a sturdy chair?
There ought to be a knee bent
with an arm across it.

But everything
ends off abruptly, like sentences
that people start
and suddenly abandon.
They should come back some day
to haunt their speakers

like the spare parts left around
to litter up my rooms
since you decentralized.

My God, man,
will you never pull yourself
together? what sort of stripped down
suggestion of the rest of you
is badgering someone else?

THE LISTENING ROOM

Green chill awaits me.
A hard unripening roundness
daily expands, encroaching
on my absences. Only a thread
of floor remains to me
for sidling to that pinched corner
where I keep my soul.

Tonight I shall return
to fetch it. I shall inch the door
open upon the increasing
pressure, the insidious glow,
and fling my keys inside
beneath that patch of ceiling,
breathed green, to which the floor
replies in kind.

Let them talk green
at the thickest of that tart fragrance
that exudes from a seedless core,
while I rejoice
as the spring lock rejects me.

Ours fastens on mine no longer

WHERE WILL IT ALL BEGIN?

Night
Fritters its life
away.

The dawn
is working
on another morning.

letting it
ooze at its least
in dribbles
through inky fingers.

That's stingy;
flap both hands awake and let
the spatter fly,
or better
dump it all
of a lump in the ocean

and see what happens.

THE WATCHER AWAKENED

The sweep of an eyebrow measures
the breadth of whiteness, still
unbroken by writing.

I did not
draw it there; it loiters
above the area,
then drifts away.

If the wind
brought it, bobbing on the viscid
current of time,
night
anticipated my delusions.

The eye beneath it
blossoms on the paper and re-routes
my pen.

CAT'S CRADLE

It is probably all tinsel
and radiator paint:
this prodding with eyes;
this tickling with the edge of a smile;
the appearance of nearly
paranormal knowledge in the intensity
of your gaze. A rehearsal, perhaps,
or something you wear to parties,

I tell myself,
after so many feints
at offers in an atmosphere
hypnotic with intimacy;
glances slipped to me like bribes
like joints,
which you know
will never be taken;
smiles that might well be stolen
from you
if I believed them,
and that limp,
leftover hand on the couch
which is waiting for something.

Nothing that I would do,
of course,
and nothing you want to happen.

WATER BABY

I seem to have you limp
in my hands.

Like water
you are hard to hold.

An arm leaks stealthily
down through my fingers.

A leg, flung over my thumb,
kicks convulsively, almost
pulling the rest of you after it,
out and over,

and then my forefinger;
goes through your eye.
Your nose sinks inwards;

I wish you would stiffen up
for once, bone yourself
back to some semblance
of a human body,
and lend me an arm
that bends
only at the elbow.

I go on wishing.

MY COUSIN IN VERTICAL ORBIT

She was so neat about it.
She slid head downward into the chimney
and skimmed the floor from the fireplace
to the window. Non-stop and out.

Then up over eaves
and back down
in swan-dive through the parlor.

The last time the rug went with her.

It will home, grime thickened
at her next sweep through,
and I, apparently,
will be cursed with a night
of numbering beers against
the underbellies of her revolutions,

or of strolling among the fireflies
at the garden's end,
for the best view of her backward
curve of spine, as she arches
the ridgepole cleanly
between two lightning rods,
and drives the bats
as crazy as human beings.

She was neat
about it. Even with her measurements,
she negotiated the bore of the flue,
emerging as plump
as ever, never having dislodged
a gobbet of soot, spotted
her dress, or unhooked her coiffure,

but three were many times
more than enough
of that.

YOU NEVER NOTICE

At the street crossing
I took you by the crook of your arm.
With the faintest sound
of ripping, it came off, and I
was left holding it.

You never noticed,

but continued to gash the air
with your face as you shoved it ahead
of you to the opposite sidewalk.

Your mind
ran no longer
beside us; it has started up
an idea or two
in an alley and was off
in pursuit.

Small swarms of letters
clustered in wriggling blots
against the sky. Your eyes worried
at their spasms of rearrangement,
squinted apparent meanings
from several spellings.

So often
you leave me with the stem
of a conversation
clamped in my teeth, a rhythm
of breathing
in the telephone,
an arm.

OPTICAL ILLUSIONS

My bones are bare now;
gnawed down by moonlight
and picked clean.

They are flashes,
a scarce width more
than flickerings
of recognition.

When you sort them,
they know your fingers;
the silver bowl,
the icy water,
their convulsed appearance
on its surface,
and in your hunger.

ENOUGH OF THIS

Shut up, old wound.
If your mouth must stay open.
let it laugh;

dry cackles locked together
like knitted burrs,
lodged in the scruff of memory,

and let the words
that fester in it terminate
before shape
catches them up
in your thread of a throat

Clamp your gaping
truth on quiet.

BAD COMPANY

If a thick, green discharge
issues from underneath his fingernails
and stains the carpet,
and if the teeth in his smile
gleam solidly with stainless steel,

a bad evening is probably
ahead of you,
if not a frightful one.

If she brings in a dazzle
of chandelier lusters and
a stiletto laugh;
if her heels strike sparks
from the parquetry and her hair
retracts visibly into her scalp,

meditate, if you can,
upon an inexpensive lawyer,

and fire insurance,

or if the two of them
arrive together as a team and vanish
upon the moment of appearance,
scrutinize the fireplace,

then if any sort of ankles and shoes
whatever hang into it
from the chimney,

saturate the whole house
with the stench of cabbage (even
if simulated) and take your leave.

Close the door smartly.
Hang some bacon from the knob,
and run like hell.

IT MUST BE A JOKE

Your face has slimmed
and twisted, one eye
exploded into the center
of a spider's wheel;

Your nose has been smudged
from sight, your mouth
slipped sideways and drawn crooked.

How have you become
so distorted when my face
is missing from behind
your shoulder;

when you clutch at yourself
with both arms across
from me at the table;

when there is no mirror?

WINDFALL

Greenbacks slithering
across my desk.

They rustle. Gouged
from envelopes
drifting into piles.

Sticking,
wilted and crumpled; some few torn.
They are mounting. I can hardly
count them. They continue coming.

Where shall I put
tomorrow's payload since today's
still must be organized,
how handle them? Bind them in packs
of twenty and press them down
to fit in tidy packets?

Leaves are drifting into herds
and from the boughs
of abandoned trees in silence
silver coins are falling.

DOWN MEADOW SLOPE

Look down the moonsweep
to a march of spruce
and see your own form
naked,
 dancing:
how fireflies come and go

as if from between your ribs
how grasses bristle
through your shins
how you stick on the twigs
of a crouching bush
as if you were a twist of fog.

You are!
but what is lacking
there tonight that seems
to make you real?

END OF AN ERA

Victory fallen from the Arch in Grand Army Plaza, Brooklyn

You would never be satisfied
with conciliation;
deploring peace talks
you would press your demands
for bombs.

Anyone with as many sharp spikes
and excrescences to embellish
a helmet as you have
could only cry for combat.

Look how you have incited
your horses to rear and plunge
as you lash them to leaping
from the top of the arch.

You have long been pleased
to deafen daily with those trumpets
in your ears. Life without
a continuing clamor
would be unproductive for you.
You will have to be Queen Tumult to exist,
to fulfill your imagined destiny.

But as of this date
you have gone too far. A step back
(always a misdemeanor in your code)
to an extra thrust

of your highly unnecessary sword
has unstepped you

and you have been poured
head down in a tumble of scrap metal
cast as your garments
from the rear of your chariot,
secured still by some obstinate
remnant of uncorroded bronze
to your heels, with your foolish sword
menacing pedestrians below you
in Grand Army Plaza.

So much for you,
Senora Machismo!

SOUTHWARD RUNNING

It is all as it should be;
he shall soon be entering
from the North
as I have often seen him,

running

his right arm lifted high
above his head
flourishing a five-branched
candelabrum

its small fires flattened
by his speed and bright
with the wine-sharp pallor
of a city evening
against the peach glow
of the arching lamps

running

as if with the pressure
of news to spring
upon the ear and eye

in sparks
in mantra.

ignoring questions
friends and onlookers swept aside

slight curling at the edges
of a skimmed milk moon
and all the sky
widened to five more senses
and dimensions,

running!

VANDALISM

A smart bite of gravel

which you dropped in my boot
and which gnawed at the stance
of my determination or a muscle
rendered useless
by a bruise;

bullet holes pocked
in the lid of my grand piano
after your last invasion
of my privacy of mind.

These I charge
with damage to my self esteem

not you
with your fuse and matches.

ANOTHER SEASON

In bygone years the sunlight
bit the buildings just this way
in this season by late afternoon.

Now every one of them has come
to life with all its faces,
voices, emotions and events
so clearly that they all
but injure me.

Bricks still
glow almost as with some
certain light within them.

In country towns a new paint
in pastels takes on an unsuspected vigor
as if to say,

Here I am.

So many budding Autumns
heaped up upon one another
in piles like flaming leaves
recall as many other times
and places as music
and as many dead beginnings.

THE PRIVILEGED MOMENTS: PUBLISHING BARBARA A. HOLLAND

The poems in this volume were first published by The Grim Reaper and The Poet's Press in the years 1973 through 1975. First, we issued a sampler of the overall work as the chapbook, *Autumn Wizard*. Later, the work appeared in two chapbooks as *Crises of Rejuvenation*, Volumes 1 and 2. Several reprints followed, but the integral work has now been out of print for many years.

It was evident from the start that this was no ordinary collection of poems. When I first met Barbara Holland in 1971 I was immediately struck by her forceful language — rocky, granitic, yet sinuous — and by the quirky, bizarre and sometimes hilarious images she was able to conjure. When I discovered that many of the poems were inspired by the visual world of the paintings of Rene Magritte, the Belgian Surrealist, one of my favorite artists, I was hooked.

The original volumes of this poetic cycle did not contain specific references to Magritte other than the title poem, and two of my own cover designs that emulated Magritte in concept. The first cover showed an apple setting over a seascape, clearly a tribute to Magritte. The second volume had a line drawing of a rose extracting its color from a blood transfusion, an illustration of one of Barbara's poems.

In retrospect, I think we were remiss in not making the Magritte connection more clear. Readers who have never seen Magritte's paintings have enjoyed these poems. But experienced together with a perusal of the painter's work, the works take on extra resonance. The reader gains a common visual and epistemological experience with the poet and can thus participate more readily in her flights of fantasy. In my own case, I found that the Magritte paintings inspired me to render my own impressions, reactions and interpretations into poems as well. Sometimes, Barbara and I wrote poetic dialogues with the mysterious Magritte world as our shared take off point.

What is surrealistic in the context of these poems? Magritte's work differs substantially from what I shall call, for lack of a better term, the work of "hard" Surrealists. He poked fun at manifestos and nearly always rooted his paintings in reality. Where a Dali landscape is often completely alien, and where other modernists even abandon traditional representation altogether, Magritte's paintings depict the strange and inexplicable in a realistic, painterly manner, centering on the cityscapes and landscapes of Paris, Belgium, the European forest and countryside, mountains and seashore. Rows of town houses line up in tedious splendor, their windows reflecting or capturing proper clouds. Magritte's sea and sky are photographically perfect, except when intruded upon by interloping impossibilities.

In "The Empire of Light," for example, the artist presents a house, a garden wall, some trees and a street lamp. The lamp casts light and shadows out over the lawn and it is reflected in a pond. All is dark under the trees. An ordinary, realistic scene, depicted with amazing subtlety in the gradations of tones of light on the underside of the trees.

The element of the Surreal enters when we look at the sky above the scene. It is bright, noontime blue! The scene below is night, above is high noon. The pond, of course, *should be* blue as the sky, and the trees should be lit from all directions by refracted sunlight. Magritte blends the underlit trees and their foliage into a silhouette against the blue sky, a masterpiece of illusion. The observer knows that something is “mysterious” or “wrong” about the painting, but its photographic realism fools the eye.

Other Magritte paintings are more blatantly Surreal. An eye stares out of the center of a slice of ham. Three moons perch in the limbs of a tree. An eagle hatches out of a jagged mountain peak. Household objects and a lion litter the edge of a road.

Magritte admired mystery stories about secret agents, and was fascinated with the works of Edgar Allan Poe. He created a visual world in which mysterious objects, such as little round sleigh bells, French horns, lions, and bowler hats, appear again and again on beaches, in forests, or in city streets. Or, a familiar room and its objects are petrified, or a sky is rendered as a stack of cubes.

This combination of realism and the mysterious makes Magritte unlike most other Surrealists. The same factor makes his work much more accessible to average viewers. There is a special appeal for poets, who are always looking for ways to turn the everyday into the mysterious.

Barbara Holland is not a “Surrealist” in the literary sense. There is no randomness, no impulse toward Dadaist fist-shaking. The ambiguities of meaning, the shattering of form and syntax that run rampant in literary Surrealism have no place in her writing. Like Magritte with his photographic style, Barbara writes in plain English, often in a narrative that could easily be read as prose to the unwitting listener with poem-phobia. Her voice speaks in complete sentences, tightly packed clauses, and unambiguous meaning.

The world of Barbara Holland, then, is the real one. The twist is simply that impossible things happen in her world. Roses drink bottled blood, tree stumps sprout human ears, unaccompanied crutches stride the avenues, and a knife appears in the poet’s back as a permanent ornament. She writes with clarity and wit about each brand of impossibility.

How much Magritte does the reader have to know to appreciate these poems? The answer is — surprisingly little. Browse through a book of Magritte’s work to get a feel for the visual world, and you are ready for most of what Barbara deals out. In fact, most of these poems are not specifically about any particular Magritte painting. Magritte merely provides the template that Barbara superimposes over her New York turf. She sees her urban setting as if through the canvasses of the master, and tells us what she sees.

I interviewed Barbara about the poems in *Crises of Rejuvenation* when we were preparing the 1986 edition. Following are the notes we made about some of the poems that *do* spring from actual Magritte paintings, presented here for those who might take pleasure in reading the poems against the paintings. Some other passing thoughts about the inspiration or intention of certain poems also emerged from the conversations, and are they repeated here so that the reader may benefit from the background information.

PERSONAL VALUES was provoked by the painting “Les Valeurs personnelles” (1952) which depicts a room full of oversize objects. A comb and brush and a bar of soap overwhelm a normal sized bed, while the room's wallpaper depicts a Surreal sky and clouds. Another poem, THE LODGER, also uses this painting as a taking-off-point.

A STREET THROUGHOUT THE YEARS depicts a repeated dream that never attains a conclusion, a door that is never reached.

VERNAL EQUINOX introduces the concept of petrified objects, people and even emotions that Barbara has adopted from Magritte. Paintings by Magritte that come to mind are “The Song of the Violet” and “Souvenir de Voyage III.”

In INTIMATIONS and, later, THE EVENING FISH, sky and ocean are interchanged at dusk wherein fish fly among the television antennae and chimney tops. You have to see the sunsets over Greenwich Village through a succession of seasons to appreciate how true this is to the neighborhood where we all lived.

The dinner date in AN ABOMINABLE BREAKFAST, Barbara tells me, is like one of Magritte's petrified bourgeoisie.

When Barbara empathized with a nephew in a cast for a broken leg, she began fantasizing about a pair of unpeopled crutches, perhaps the most bizarre automata ever. LOUDER THAN LIFE depicts their adventures.

The title poem, CRISES OF REJUVENATION, refers to several key Magritte paintings. The poem centers, though, on a series of perverse paintings in which Magritte painted objects and then put incorrect names under them, such as a tumbler of water called “l'Orage (Storm)” in “La Clef des Songes (The Key of Dreams).” There is also the famous painting, “Ceci n'est pas une pipe (This is not a pipe).”

Barbara wondered about the origin of the cubed sky shown in paintings such as “La legende doree,” and here is her theory, made by a sorcerer in MY OLD FRIEND, THE SORCERER.

WHO GOES FIRST is a literal reaction to the painting titled “Ready-Made Bouquet.”

THE BEST OF ALL POSSIBLE WORLDS was provoked by one of the most haunting paintings of the 20th Century, Magritte's “Castle of the Pyrenees,” which depicts a castle atop an egg-shaped rock that floats serenely over a seascape. Epics could be written about that one painting.

THE INEVITABLE KNIFE is a masterpiece of paranoia fit for one of Magritte's trailed secret agents. When Barbara read this, she twisted about, looking for the knife in her back which she could neither see nor extricate.

Those seeking to explain poets' visions as the result of drugs will be only slightly satisfied to see that Barbara can transform bleak Sixth Avenue into a circus after having only three cups of my infamous Lapsang Sou-chong tea, in HIGH ON THREE CUPS OF TEA The poem contains one of the most wondrous streaks of alliteration in all of Barbara's poems as well.

The eagle hatching out of the mountain in “The Domaine of Arnheim” — itself a mysterious reference to a story by Poe — provoked several poems, including AS ONE POSSESSED and, later, THE IRON URGE and AQUILA.

Sun, moon and stars occasionally get stuck in window panes, mirrors or treetops in Magritte paintings. This happens in the poem, THE BREAKER. Paintings with this imagery include “September 16th” and “The Banquet.”

AUTUMN WIAZRD is dedicated to Ray Bradbury, the undisputed Lord of October. The “indigo, coral and turquoise” leaves might belong in a Magritte forest.

MIDNIGHT ON THE ESPLANADE is a straightforward explication of the painting “Le Mal du Pays.”

Barbara says of CLOSE CALL FOR THE SECRET AGENT that it represents her pursuit of Magritte’s personality. “I wanted to find out what kind of man he was, and never did figure it out,” she recalled. The poem evokes the many pictures of bowler-hatted men who stare straight at you with masklike, inscrutable faces. Magritte’s paintings, “The Menaced Assassin” and “The Month of Harvest” come to mind.

NOT NOW, WANDERER is contemporaneous with the Magritte poems and certainly shares its mountainous landscapes with those of the painter. But this poem has its origins in Wagner’s Ring Cycle, the paganized operatic setting of the *Nibelungenlied*, in the figure of Wotan with his single eye, staff and floppy hat. The Wanderer is the name by which the Father of the Gods chooses to be known in the mysterious episode where he tries to block Siegfried’s passage. The “messenger ravens” will be recognized by Wagner fans as the twin birds that signal the imminent assassination of Siegfried. This poem is a passionate song of hopeless, lost, ineluctable passion. It reduces audiences to stunned, purgated silence, so much so that it can be almost unendurable to hear another poem for some long moments afterwards. I am reminded of Mahler’s dictum that five minutes silence should follow the first, funereal movement of his Resurrection Symphony. To hear Barbara read this poem when she was at her peak was one of the great thrills of my poetic life.

TAKE FLIGHT TO MONTREAL! is a personal favorite of mine, for reasons of pure ego. Barbara wrote this after a dinner at The Poet’s Press loft during which I playfully hinted that I was installing some multi-tentacled Lovecraftian monster to protect the premises against burglars. My poem in reply to this one appears side by side with her original in the Grim Reaper anthology *May Eve*.

Magritte playfully has window panes retain an exterior image even when shattered and leaning against a wall. Here, in THE ITINERANT WINDOW, Barbara has an entire window moving about and winding up in the boughs of a tree. The images trapped in glass also figure in A CUP OF COFFEE.

BEFORE THE BEGINNING is a seascape, very reminiscent of Magritte’s “Le temps menaçant (Threatening weather).”

Rocks from Magritte’s petrified world take on a practical use to punish editors who have the temerity to reject poetry manuscripts in A COVERING LETTER.

In ENTRANCE OF ORIGINS a face turns into rock, somewhat reminiscent of Magritte’s petrified world, but also reminding one of some of Dali’s ideas.

APPORTS evokes a French medieval fortress as an immutable object whose ephemeral shadows move like gypsies from place to place. An enigmatic poem. The origin of NOT FUNGUS, NO, NEVER THAT!, says the poet, “was put in my head by the way fungus looks: noses, chins, ears.”

SCHUYKILL WEATHER, by its title, betrays the poet’s Philadelphia origins.

I IMAGINE YOUR GUITAR was inspired by a display of heat lightning.

In SO THERE, DESCARTES! the secret agent vanishes into thin air — bit by bit. In LEAVINGS, pieces of him linger. The secret agent—the man whose face you never quite see, is also the “you” in SUSTAINED ENCHANTMENT. We suspect, too, that the man always a few steps ahead in SUBWAY EXIT, and YOU NEVER NOTICE, and THE BRAIN WALKS CLOSE BEHIND may be one and the same.

Magritte used umbrellas in some of his work, such as the painting of an opened umbrella with a glass of water on top. In SUSPENSE FOR DAYS a church steeple threatens to open like a parasol.

Mirrors that reflect the wrong images are another familiar Magritte device, in such canvases as “Les liaisons dangereuses” and “La Reproduction Interdite.” In STRIKE TWO, Barbara has done with Surreal mirrors and then goes into a frenzy over distorted echoes. A tinge of the same marvelous sense of paranoia infects this poem as in THE INEVITABLE KNIFE. Later, in KEEPING THE WINDOW CLOSED, the moon and some stars get caught in the parlor mirror. Not “billions and billions” of them, as Carl Sagan would say, but just a few.

When the president of an eminent poetry society just happened to win that group’s \$700 prize for “best poem” with an ode “On the Opening of a Walnut,” Barbara was provoked to write her nutty lyric.

In “The Therapeutist” and a series of related paintings Magritte shows a man who has an oversized bird cage as a torso, which provoked the marvelous poem, A TRYST BENEATH THE BIRDHOUSE.

THE BLIGHT is a character study of a very real character, a small-time con artist who temporarily infected the New York poetry scene in the early to mid-1970s. His hyperactive behavior and grandiose schemes are parodied in this poem.

HOME CAN BE ANYWHERE was provoked by a bus ride through part of Staten Island.

SOME DAY A SUDDEN CRAVING is a true story of a hospital worker who had a novel gardening tip.

In ANCESTRAL VISION an old face suddenly takes on a boyish look and the poet wonders which persona is the real one.

Dr. Freud gets his comeuppance in THAT CERTAIN QUAIANTNESS. You had to be around in the 1960s and 1970s to see what a grip Freud’s ideas still had. Psychiatrists made a lot of money keeping neurotic, well-heeled patients in a state of total emotional dependence. And it was always about Mommy and Daddy and those repressed desires.

THE SUMMER’S FINAL SEASON concerns a dark cloud hanging over a peaceful village. Everyone pretends it doesn’t exist. Although the poet didn’t intend it, there is something about this poem that, to me,

represents the whole of modern Cold War anxiety. The cloud hangs there, waiting to “liberate its cargo” which would “plummet like a stone on target.” For a generation born under the cloud of a nuclear threat, this poem is an unwitting representation of how life just “goes on.”

The real-life paranoia of President Nixon is portrayed in THE CAPRICORN TAPESTRY. Barbara recalled a newscast in which Secret Service agents had scurried on Nixon's orders to disarm a bomb on the White House lawn, which turned out to be a golf ball. If Nixon was made edgy by protesters on the sidewalk, the poet wonders, how would he feel about nosy astronauts staring down at him from the moon?

THE LISTENING ROOM is based on the painting of the same title—possibly one of Magritte's more familiar ones. A large green apple fills almost all the available space in a room. Barbara sent this to me just after I had sent her my ferocious supernatural poem, “Fête.” “A black wedding?” she replied, enclosing this poem and adding, “Well, here's a green divorce!”

THE SORCERER'S MOON is a montage of different images from Magritte, which the reader will recognize from other poems, if not from their constituent paintings.

COMPANIONS, with its bare toes bursting out of a pair of boots is from Magritte's “The Red Model.”

This new edition of *Crises of Rejuvenation* contains a number of poems which were not in the first edition, eleven of them, in fact. By adding them to this edition, we have captured all the poems written by Barbara Holland during the time she was under the nearly full-time spell of merging Magritte's surrealism with the hard realities of life in New York.

It is a privilege to bring this masterful cycle of poems back into print at last. These poems have taken nest in my own consciousness, as they will in yours. You will think of them, of their strange and beautiful images. Even better, you will find that certain phrases become a part of your own vocabulary. You may even find that your perceptions are just slightly altered so that you, too, sit down and write about how the real and unreal collide and invade one another's territory all around you.

The answer to the book's cryptic title lies therein, doesn't it? We grow old and die by seeing things only in the conventional way. We are rejuvenated when we can see things through another sense of dimension, when we can use our imagination so that “names and the objects which they had previously owned divorce for other partners.” It may be mad, but it is glorious!

— Brett Rutherford

Providence, Rhode Island, January 1986/January 2006